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RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 3634  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000592

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IT](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: FM FRATTINI ABRUPTLY CANCELS TEHRAN VISIT  
  
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Classified By: A/DCM Barbara A. Leaf for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. FM Franco Frattini abruptly canceled his May 20-21 visit to Tehran when Iran insisted on a meeting with President Ahmadi-Nejad in Semnan, the location of the May 20 missile launch. Frattini had intended to meet with Iranian FM Manouchehr Mottaki to discuss Iranian participation at the June 26-27 G8 Afghanistan Stabilization Conference, and tried to resist Iranian pressure to meet with President Ahmadi-Nejad, but was prepared for the possibility of an unscheduled meeting despite EU and US concerns that such a meeting would hand the Iranian president a pre-election propaganda victory. According to MFA sources, Frattini made the decision to cancel the trip after the Iranian government informed him that he would have to travel to Semnan for the Ahmadi-Nejad meeting. Italy will send Special Afghanistan Envoy Attilio Iannunci to Iran next week to try to confirm Iranian Ministerial participation in the G8 Conference. End summary.

Frattini Insists on Tehran Visit  
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¶2. (C) Frattini's visit had been in the works for some time and late last week, the Italian MFA sought both Post and Washington's thoughts on a Frattini/Ahmadi-Nejad meeting. Post stressed our concerns both with Giampiero Massolo, MFA Secretary General and with Frattini's chief of staff, Alain Economides, that a meeting with Ahmadi-Nejad would give him a pre-election boost and that they would not be able to control the message should a meeting take place. Post's advice to not meet with Ahmadi-Nejad was in direct conflict with the advice Frattini was receiving from his own ministry which had succumbed to Iranian pressure for a meeting with the Iranian president.

¶3. (C) Tuesday, May 19, the GOI publicly announced that FM Frattini would travel to Tehran to meet with Iranian FM Mottaki. After a chorus of protests from some EU members, and Israel, that Frattini's visit would hand Ahmadi-Nejad a campaign propaganda victory, the FM's staff clarified that he would be going under the auspices of the G8, not as an EU representative, and that he would seek to avoid a meeting with the Iranian president. Frattini's intention would be to secure Iranian ministerial participation in the G8 Afghanistan Stabilization Conference. Acknowledging publicly the possibility of an encounter with Ahmadi-Nejad, the MFA claimed Frattini was prepared to raise Afghanistan and human rights, but would not discuss the nuclear issue.

And Ahmadi-Nejad Insists He Come to Semnan

14. (C) On May 20 at noon, when Frattini and his delegation, which included MFA Director General for the Middle East Cesare Ragaglini and Special Envoy Iannuci, were departing for the airport to travel to Tehran, the Iranian government instructed them to change its itinerary to stop in Semnan, the location of the May 20 missile launch, for a meeting with Ahmadi-Nejad. Frattini immediately ordered the visit canceled and made a public statement expressing deep regret for a missed opportunity to examine the possibilities and modalities for involving Iran in the stabilization of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Euros Irked with Lack of Coordination

15. (C) Rebecca Fabrizi, Political Counselor of the UK Embassy in Rome, confirmed that Frattini's staff tried to conceal preparations for the visit until details had been confirmed. The MFA initially denied that Frattini had plans to go to Iran until early this week. Once the UK government found out, FM Miliband and the UK Embassy in Rome tried to convey concerns about the Italian decision to break with an EU understanding of not making high level visits to Tehran (Frattini's visit would have been the first this year). The MFA, however, did not return calls to the UK Embassy staff and Miliband was unable to schedule a call.

Still Seeking Iranian Participation in G8 Afghanistan Conference

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16. (C) The GOI will continue to try to secure Mottaki's participation in the G8 Afghanistan Stabilization Conference and will dispatch Iannuci to Tehran for further discussions next week. To date, the MFA has not gotten any indications from the Tehran that the cancellation of Frattini's trip will negatively influence its decision on attendance at the Trieste event. Contacts in the G8 office remain confident, however, that Iran will participate at some level.

Comment

17. (C) Ahmadi-Nejad's attempt to use Frattini's visit to secure an electoral advantage nearly materialized despite Italian assurances that it would be able to control the message tightly. Frattini will look to Iannucci's visit to Tehran for some positive signs of Iran's high-level participation, but it is too early to tell if his aborted trip will create any lasting friction between Rome and Tehran. Before the change of location made the visit clearly untenable, Frattini was willing to risk handing Ahmadi-Nejad an electoral propaganda coup in order to deliver the prize of high-level Iranian participation in Trieste.

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